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Dec. 01, 2008

From the April/May 2006 Issue

The time is now! If not now, when? Electronic document management systems (EDMS) for the tax and accounting practice have come of age. We are rapidly approaching the point where document management reaches critical mass in the tax and accounting profession, defined here as when the number of firms that have implemented EDMS outnumber those that haven't. While I don't have any hard statistics to back up this assertion, I believe you will validate this premise as you begin attending conferences, seminars and other CPE events and talk with your peers this spring and summer. This year is likely to be a watershed year in terms of document management systems and their deployment in the tax and accounting profession. This is good news because it is a cornerstone initiative to enable a tax and accounting practice to work effectively in a global marketplace linked through a flow of digital information.

In addition to the reviews in this section, there are two articles focusing on document management:

- [Webcast to Offer Document Management Primer](#)
- [Tools To Enhance Or Supplement Your Core Document Management System](#)

So if you're ready to begin the tedious, yet important task of finding

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is important in the selection. If you would like additional insight into the concept of deploying document management in a tax and accounting firm, refer to my article in the April/May 2005 issue of this magazine.

Seven basic categories were used to review the different solutions: Installation & Configuration, User Interface, Integration, Training & Support, Workflow & Document Tracking, Security and Pricing.

Installation & Configuration refers to what it takes to deploy the system in terms of technology and services. The primary feature impacting this aspect is whether or not the vendor offers a hosted solution. If that is the case, then many of the deployment issues are circumvented due to the fact that you will be utilizing the vendor's IT infrastructure and system administration services. In either case, you need to address the issue of planning and executing the deployment from a workflow integration perspective.

The **User Interface** aspect broadly assesses the overall usability of the system from a look-and-feel perspective, including intuitive screen designs, ease of navigation and key features. There are two key components in the **Integration** capabilities. The first is integration with accountant-centric applications including tax preparation software, electronic workpaper systems and practice management software. The other is the integration with more generic paperless tools including MS Outlook, Adobe Acrobat, MS Office, etc. An important factor in the selection of any technology solution is the quality and availability of **Training & Support** provided by the vendor or third-party affiliates.

As you delve further into this initiative, you will realize the impact electronic document management has on your workflows. A vendor who can provide you with

assistance beyond the technical setup and configuration of the system and help

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systems quickly come to realize that the real value is in the ability to streamline your workflows through a paperless model. For this attribute, we focus on functionality that allows you to route engagement-related documents through the firm and track important engagement data such as due-date monitoring, budget tracking and more.

The AICPA's 2006 Top 10 important technology issues list is out, and information security is at the top of the list. The **Security** of your digital information is becoming increasingly important. Access to and the transfer of electronic information is much easier than in a paper-based system, and that is the core benefit of EDMS. Therefore, you must make sure you exercise your professional responsibility to protect the security and confidentiality of your clients' information. Key security features to assess include password protection, audit trail of document activity, document checkout tracking and document authentication.

The final evaluation category in these reviews is **Pricing**. The key here is to make sure you are comparing apples to apples. The factors that impact the overall cost of deployment include hardware, software, technical services, training services, project management, workflow design and more. If your price comparison properly accounts for each of these items, you will get an accurate comparison of the pricing differences. The difference in price between a hosted solution and an internally deployed system can be misleading. The real value of a hosted solution is in all the services that you don't see, including the technology infrastructure, disaster recovery protection and system administration. So be sure you take these differences into account.

One additional objective of this review is to determine whether the solution

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serving as a strategic advisor to tax and accounting firms throughout the country. CPA Crossings has guided dozens of firms through the implementation of document management and electronic workpaper solutions, as well as other technology strategies.



Acct1st Technology Group, LLC

— Acct1st EDRMS

Acct1st is designed specifically for the tax and accounting firm environment as an enterprise-level solution that can support the needs of larger firms. Julie Fry, CPA, of Dallas-based SalmonBeach & Associates, PLLC decided on Acct1st because it was created for accounting firms.

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[Review](#)

Cabinet NG, Inc. — CNG-SAFE

Cabinet NG – Shared Access Filing Environment (CNG-SAFE) is a document management system designed primarily for the SMB (small and midsize business) market. It provides a comprehensive collection of features and functions that meet the needs of this market.

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[Review](#)

CCH — ProSystem *fx* Document

ProSystem *fx* Document is designed as an accountant-centric application for midsize to larger firms. As the product development evolves, it will feature a much stronger integration with

the vendor's tax and accounting software product line. ProSystem

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by our standards, which were outlined in the introductory article to this review section.

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[Review](#)

[Doculex, Inc. — Doculex Goby Capture](#)

Doculex Goby Capture (Doculex) is truly a solution targeted towards a horizontal marketplace. The vendor's website identifies 13 separate industries that it targets, ranging from accounting to defense. This broad market approach requires a solution that is deep in features and functions that can be adapted to different situations. Doculex is appropriately classified as an enterprise-level system and is not accountant-centric, per our standard.

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[Review](#)

[Webcast to Offer Document Management Primer](#)

When properly used, document management systems increase the productivity and profitability of professional accounting firms, while also enhancing client relationships through quicker retrieval and improved collaboration capabilities.

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[Review](#)

[Intuit — Lacerte Document Management System](#)

This application is designed primarily as an add-on

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Office Tools Pro is a unique solution in that it is a suite of core accountant/small business applications, which is completely integrated and operated from a single interface. The balance between simplicity and depth of functionality is impressive. It is not accountant-centric per se, but it is targeted to small firms.

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[Review](#)

RJS

Software Systems — [WebDocs CPA](#)

RJS Software Systems started out as an IBM Business Partner providing AS400 consulting and solutions. The company's original foray into document management evolved around "cold" archival systems that automate the tracking of stored paper-based documents. In 1999, WebDocs was created as a web-hosted document management solution.

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Thomson Creative Solutions —
[File Cabinet CS](#)

FileCabinet CS is designed primarily to be an integrated document management system that supports the entire Creative Solutions (CS) suite of applications. As such, it is very much an accountant-centric solution, particularly for firms that have standardized on the CS suite of applications.

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Tools To Enhance Or Supplement Your Core Document Management System

The evolution of document management systems has created a market of additional software and services that enhance or supplement the core document management application.

[Read Full Review](#)

Document Management Systems 2006

— Executive Summary

As you peruse the individual reviews, you should begin to gain an appreciation of all the different aspects to consider and evaluate when you embark on the search for the optimal document management (DM) solution for your firm. This review is intended to provide you with a starting point in your selection process by offering insight on the solutions that were submitted for review.

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Technology

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